

The good Old Way Ex-
amined. 1506/219

BEING
AN ANSWER
TO THE
BELFAST
SOCIETY:

Jer. 6. 16.

Thus saith the Lord, Stand in the Ways
and see, and ask for the old Paths where
is the good Way? &c.

By *John Malcome*, M. A. Minister of the Gospel.



BELFAST:
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To my Reverend Brethren, 3
The Belfast Society.

I Received yours warm from the Press, & soon had an Answer ready, but did not think fit then to publish it. Many Judicious Readers observ'd that therein you had given up your Cause (& therefore there was no need of an Answer) by a pretended Explication of the Title of the Famous Sermon preach't at *Belfast*; I was of that mind my self, and continue so still. But notwithstanding, that I may obviate some Calumny's cast on my self, and that I may take notice of some of your Doctrine, which is very unsound, and by which the People of God are ready to be corrupted; I'm resolv'd now to let it see the light. But before I proceed any further, I shall make bold to give a short Advice to you the *Belfast Society*, that at your first *Sederunt*, you admonish the Author of the *Historical Essay upon the Loyalty of Presbyterians*, that the next impression he would leave out one Passage he brings for the defence of the *Presbyterian Loyalty*, as being inconsistent with his own and the Society's Practice, in opposing the Subscription of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, at the late Settlement of the Reverend Mr. *Haliday* in *Belfast*.

The

The Passage you'll find. Essay. page 23, and 24. which I give you in his own Words. *The second Passage is taken from the Westminster Confession, allowed also & received by the Church of Scotland, & by the Presbyterians in Ireland, as the Confession of their Faith and as such subscribed by all Ministers & Preachers of both and composed by an Assembly of the most famous English Divines. In the 23d. Chap. of the said Confession, we have these Words;*

The Civil Magistrate may not assume to himself, the Administration of the Word and Sacraments, or the power of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, yet he hath Authority, and it is his duty to take order, that Unity and Peace be preserv'd in the Church; that the Truth of God be kept pure and intire, that all Blasphemies and Heresies be Suppress'd, all Corruptions and Abuses in Worship and Discipline prevented or reform'd, and all the Ordinances of God duly settled, administr'd & observ'd. For the better effecting whereof he hath Power to call Synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them, be according to the mind of God.

The Author of the Essay brings all this as a strong Argument for the Loyalty of Presbyterians, and so it is; but he and his fellows have lost that Argument now, by opposing the Subscription of the said Confession. *Sed quantum mutatus ab illo* — I leave it to the Judicious Reader whether that Paragraph quoted from the Confession of Faith, and approv'd by the Author of the Essay, & Mr. Abernethy's Sermon. page 34. and 35. can agree.

You set several Sections of the Confession of Faith in the frontispice of your Letter, that the Reader may see you have a value for it; but for as well as you love it, you can reason with all your might against subscribing of it; *The*

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The good Old Way Examined, &c.

I Lately met with a Pamphlet with this lovely Title, *The good Old Way*, directed to my self, by the *Belfast Society*; how many there are of this Society I know not, but it will not advance their Reputation much, if they should get the Victory of one aged Man. And time will discover whether the way of this Society, be *the good Old Way*

Brethren, the first charge you lay against me. is *Page 2. that I have treated you with so much Contempt and Reproach as tends to make you Vile and Odious in the Eyes of your People and Reverend Brethren &c* You profess great Charity for me, but you alledge my *Mistakes, Credulity, and misguided Zeal for Truth, leads me to charge you with Opinions which you disclaim.* This I shall consider afterward.

But in the mean Time I Sincerely declare that I never design'd to make any of you *Vile, &c.* Is it not possible that one Friend or Brother may sharply reprove another, and yet the Reproof have no Tendency to make the other *Vile*; we have a clear

clear instance of this, in *Paul's* withstanding *Peter* to the Face. *Gal* 2. 11. &c. And if *Peter* had gone on in his Dissimulation, he had made himself & those that dissembled with him Vile.

My Remarks upon the abuse of the Press are true and plain; but you unjustly charge me with leading the unwary Reader to think that I designed to rank you amongst Arians, &c. And hence you call upon me to explain myself; pray read my *Reflections* again; where you'll find, after I have told you that *Atheists*, &c. abuse the Press; I then add, in a distinct Sentence, which is not apply'd to you more than to many others; And even among those of a better Character this holds true that's told us *Ecc* 12. 12. *Of making many Books there is no end*. This is so plain to any Man except such as have a mind to pick quarrels, that I need say no more of it.

As for your joining in a voluntary Society, I do not quarrel the thing, but the manner of it; viz. That you sett up a Society, as you call it, without consulting your respective Presbyteries before; sure it became you so to do, seeing you profess to be Presbyterians; It may be you look't upon us, either as unwilling to join in such a Society for our own improvement, or that we were not capable of improvement, or for

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Some other Reason known to your selves.

You bring for your Pattern, the *Lectures at the Morning exercises in London*; but they sett up these Lectures by common consent of the united Brethren, so have not you: As for the *Monthly meeting at Antrim*, this was carried on by the *Presbytery*, not at all by a separate Society; for there was then but one Presbytery in *Ulster*, & all of them; as they were able, met at *Antrim*. And those *Proyhecying*s in *Q. Elizabeth's* time were supported by all good Men in their several Diocesses, as they were conniv'd at, or encourag'd by their respective Bishops, but the ignorant reading *Curates*, cared for no improvement. But you have formed your Society by picking out such as you thought for your Purpose.

I know no Spirit of *Persecution* moving us to discourage you, yet I hope you will not look upon me too bold in advising you, to take heed to your *Doctrine*.

Page 6. and 7, You give us a large Catalogue of the Subjects you preach on at your Societies, and I believe that several of them are very useful in this time; but how you manag'd these *Doctrines* I cannot tell, I hope we shall know when they are publish't. For my part I would have been better pleas'd if you had asserted the *Doctrine*

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of the blessed Trinity in the Godhead, the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Satisfaction he gave to the Justice of God to the Elect, the Necessity of Repentance towards God, and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, &c. all of which are so much undervalu'd in this degenerate Age, where Scepticism prevails so much.

You tell us, you have taught that every fundamental Article of Faith hath two Essential Characters, viz. 1st That it be clearly propounded & opened in some place of Scripture that not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may all attain unto a sufficient Understanding of it. 2^d That the Holy Scriptures make it Necessary to Salvation. Now what if a contraverted Article of Faith (suppose the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ) to many appear to be clearly propounded & opened in several places of Scripture; but to others it does not appear, we are in the dark still; so that I cannot see this is a Character, of fundamentals. As to the 2^d Character, the Scriptures say nowhere Expressly, this or that Article is necessary to Salvation; and if any should acknowledge that the Scriptures in such a Text implies the necessity of such an Article to Salvation, and others should answer, there is no such necessity imply'd there, we are still

still where we were ; this Character will not end the Controversy. But you may alledge, as before, that *my misguided Zeal* leads me into *Mistakes*.

Now I come to these which you call my *three Mistakes*. The 1st. is about the meaning of the Title of the Sermon &c. The Words of the Title are plain English, and I must understand them as usually & properly they signify in the Scriptures, and in ordinary Discourse ; but if I be mistaken here its in the best of Company. Your Society gives them a meaning, that I believe no Man will do but your selves. viz. *That Religious Obedience Necessarily implies Personal Perswasion as Essential to it*. If your Author had said so at first, we should have understood him better, and he could not from that Sense have fram'd so many strange Assertions, no Man ought to say one thing and mean another. Pray advise your Author to cast his Sermon in a new mould, & explain himself.

Page 9 You charge me for supposing your Author *setts up that Perswasion, as a Rule Independent on, nay and opposite to the Scriptures themselves*. You do not tell your Reader where he will find this Charge ; in Justice you ought to have quoted my Words. I leave it to the uprejudic'd Reader whether your
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design be not to make me *Vile*, but I forgive you. And I further ask you where, in all the Sermon your Author speaks of the dependence the Conscience ought to have on the Holy Scriptures? But it's like you'll say, he meant it; as you told us with Respect to the Title of the Sermon.

In the next place you charge me with that *unfriendly Reflection*, as if I cast your Author in with the *curst Socinians*, who tell us plainly that *Humane Reason is our Rule and Guide*; even in points that directly relate to *Eternal Salvation*, and with whom your Author plainly agrees (pray Brethren be just, and add the rest of the Sentence) while he tells us p. 10. *Let every Man enjoy the freedom of following the light of his Conscience.* I leave it then to all Men of Learning and Sense, whether your Author in that point does not fall in with the *curst Socinians*; And how unfriendly soever that Reflection be, your Author gives clear ground for it.

You say now p. 10. in defence of your Author, what he nowhere in all his Sermon says. viz. *Does our asserting the necessity of a full Perswasion of God's Word being the only Rule of Faith, infer that we set up Reason as another Rule?* pray Brethren direct me to that Page of your Author's Sermon, where I shall find, *the Necessity of a full Perswasion*
of

of God's Word being the only Rule of Faith ; all we find in the Sermon is, *Personal Perswasion, Conscience, Light of Conscience &c.* without mentioning God's Word.

Further p. 10. you alledge a *Second Mistake* with respect to the Magistrates Power in matters of Conscience ; I have taken care to compare what I have said with the Sermon, and cannot find any thing I say inconsequential ; but you pass it shortly, and so shall I. But I refer you to my *Reflections*, and to the *Essay*, &c.

But p 11. My 3d Mistake, say you, is founded upon your apprehending that the Doctrine of the Sermon prostitutes the Communion of the Church, to Adulterers, incestuous Persons the vilest and most profane, and those who err in fundamental & Essential Articles of Faith ; and if all or any of these should plead to be received into the Communion of the Church, and tell her, they are fully perswaded in their own Minds, that their vile Errors are sound Principles, and their Immoralities are Lawful, the Church must receive them.

This Paragraph is a base piece of injustice ; they gather a heap of Words together, not at all as they are connected by me, but in their own Way, as they make for them, and then call them my Mistake.

I shall Transcribe to my Reader, what I say on that Subject *Reflections* p 21 *After all, shall we believe that we our selves are to obey such as watch for our Souls, and yet our Consciences in the mean time no way Subject to them but still Superior. when their Voices differ? I suppose an Heretick Adulterer, or incestuous Person plainly convict shall refuse to declare his Sorrow before the Session or Congregation that he may receive a Rebuke according to 1 Tim. 5. 20 pretending they have no power over his Conscience to require it & notwithstanding Demands to be received into full Communion with the Church; how can our Author refuse, according to his own Principles to grant him all Priviledges? He tells him, tho I refuse publick Acknowledgment, yet I do not Sin against my Light and Conscience, &c.*

The learned Society, by their unfair dealing, have oblig'd me to Transcribe what both they and I say. Does it not appear, by comparing the two quotations that they have thrust in many of their own Words, as if they were mine, and wholly pervert my meaning which is evidently this, That I'm only speaking of the Man's refusing publick Acknowledgment of his Sins, that he may receive a *Rebuke* as its required. *1 Tim 5. 20.* Now if our Author take it privately, he humors the Man's pretence, but he disobeys the Word of God.

But

But the Society pretends I say, *They are fully persuaded in their own Minds, that their vile Errors are sound Principles, and their immoralities are Lawful.* I say no such thing; sure this is not the good old way.

But, p. 13 The Reverend Society advanceth a most dangerous Assertion which I can no way agree with; *Indeed we think that its very agreeable to Charity that those points wherein the Reason of Men and the Sincerity of Christians permit them to differ, and which therefore cannot be the Essentials and Vitals of Religion should not occasion any breach, Alienation of Affection, or excommunicating Canons.*

In this Sentence there are these 2 things clearly asserted. 1st. *That in what points the Reason of Men and Sincerity of Christians permit them to differ, these points are not the Essentials and Vitals of Religion.* But the reason and pretended Sincerity of many permit them to differ from all sound Christians, in the Essential Articles of the Holy Trinity, the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Satisfaction he gave to the justice of God &c. Shall those Articles therefore not be the Essentials and Vitals of Religion? according to the Divinity of our Society; at this rate, we shall have very few Essentials of Religion, if any at all.

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2dly. There is this also plainly told us: *That its very agreeable to Charity, that those points wherein the Reason of Men, & the Sincerity of Christians permit them to differ, should not occasion any Breach, Alienation of Affection, or excommunicating Canons.* By this Charity, we must look upon Arians, Socinians, &c. To be dear Brethren and have the same affection for them as for those that are sound in the Faith. But it's observable that they never attempt to support this so comprehensive Charity by Scripture; they knew this was in vain.

I'm sure Christ and his Apostles were against this Doctrine. *Mat. 7. 15. Beware of false Prophets, &c. Phil. 3. 2. Beware of Dogs, beware of evil Workers, beware of the Concision. 2 Pet. 3. 17. Beware lest ye also, being led away with the Error of the wicked fall from your own Stedfastness.*

I'm for Charity to all those who differ from us in smaller things, so as to love them, & look upon them as Brethren; but as for such as are carried away with gross Errors, let them pretend what Reason and Sincerity they please, God forbid that I should have any more Charity for them, while they continue such, than to pray to God that they may be brought from the Error of their way!

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You may enlarge your Charity as far as you please, but at that rate, in the strength of Christ, I shall never be one of your Society ; for I'm sure this is not *the good Old Way*.

I do not *abuse the Memory* of your fathers, as you alledge, but heartily commend them, but you abuse their Memory, when you do not follow their sound Doctrine.

As for the Quotation you bring from the Reverend Mr. *George Gillespy*, in his English popish Ceremonies, I have the Book, and fully agree with him ; you may see the same thing said by me, *Reflections*, p. 16. in the Words, *I acknowledge also that God himself is the Absolute Lord of the Man's Conscience, while he keeps his Conscience to himself, he's then accountable to none but God*. But that Quotation from Mr. *Gillespy*. will not support your Doctrine. viz. That Conscience has a Supremacy in it self, I mean so far as not to be Subject to any Tribunal on Earth. *Serm.* p. 29. or that every Man may enjoy the freedom of following the light of Conscience, *Sermon*, p. 10. p. 26. you pretend you do not understand the charge of leaving us, and separating from us. The meaning of it is plain, you have set up a separate Society distinct from your Presbyteries, and without the knowledge of several Presbyteries to which you belong; and yet you would make the World believe, you have made no Separation.

The last thing I'm oblig'd to take notice of, is the unfair Representative you give of my not complying with an earnestly desired brotherly Conference ; To that I shall answer shortly, After our Presbytery met, May 18. 1720. I inquired what we met for ? For Conference, says one, about things relating to our selves and People, and particularly about our present

present Divisions; I answered I was willing to con-
fess about any thing but these Divisions; moreover
I ask'd the Brother that spoke to me, why did you
not desire a Conference before you made these Divi-
sions? This I did at least three Times, but got no An-
swer. The Presbyteries Minute will Justify what I
have said, which is this,

Belfast, May 18. 1720. The Presbytery of *Belfast*
having met for Prayer and Conference, for preserv-
ing brotherly Love amongst us, Mr. *Malcome* told
us that he was very willing to join in a Confer-
ence in any thing, except what may create a dispute
about the Principles maintain'd in this Church, some
things being publish'd, which ought to have been con-
ferr'd upon, before they were publish'd; and that he
would enter his protest against any such Conference.
He gave in his Protestation, and desired the same to
be recorded, and a Copy thereof given to him

Copia vera And Cratord.

Cl. pr. Bt.

There is then no inconsistency between my refus-
ing a Conference about these Divisions, and my tak-
ing notice of a Sermon that had been publish'd four
Months before that.

Reverend Brethren of the Society I shall leave a
short advice to you, if you think fit to take it; All
of you return to your respective Presbyteries, as you
were and let every Presbytery make up a Society,
which is indeed *the good old way*; and, if the Lord
will, I'll attend it when I'm able, and let the Pres-
bytery Judge of the Doctrine deliver'd; If this do
not please you, I have done.

F I N I S.

